

TRADE WITH A VISION

EXPORTER HELPS THE WORLD SEE

by Curt Cultice,
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Dr. M.A. Boughadou is a businessperson who not only has a vision, but also improves it for others.

After all, as an exporter of ocular lenses and eye care equipment for the treatment of cataracts, he wants customers completely focused.

“When it comes to exporting, the eyes have it,” says Dr. Boughadou, President and CEO of Medpro Ophthalmic, an Atlanta-based eye care equipment supplier. “Our goal is to help people around the world overcome cataracts and other eye problems and see as best as they can.”

And see they do, as thousands of people have benefited from his products. Medpro exports the latest in eye care equipment technology — some 52 products ranging from cataract diagnostic technology and lasik surgery equipment to diamond knives, ocular lenses and sutures.

“The technology is evolving all the time,” says Dr. Boughadou, “for example, ocular lenses are now computer-designed in acrylic and silicon, allowing for a more precise fit and treatment of cataracts and other eye problems.”

Cataracts are a cloudy film that develops under the cornea, leading to deterioration in sight. Affecting mostly people in their 50s and 60s, it is typically

an age-related problem often made worse by environment, sun and dust. However, babies are sometimes born with congenial cataracts, which cannot be treated until after age eight when the eyes are more fully developed. Cataracts in general are more prevalent in less-developed countries do to poor eye care.

When it comes to treatment, patients are first diagnosed and measured for lenses, before undergoing surgery. Although it takes a week to heal, people undergoing treatment with advanced technology are able to see the next day.

Medpro, which makes most of its ocular lenses, produces four types — in glass, acrylic, silicon and hydrophobic. Glass, known as PMMI, is the most commonly used because it’s more affordable for patients, although the healing time takes a bit longer than other types of ocular lenses.

Dr. Boughadou says he sells about 35,000 ocular lenses annually.

If you think Dr. Boughadou loves the eye care business, you’re right. He first got into the business in 1989 when he began designing eye care equipment for major manufacturers. Then he took his success a step further, launching his own firm, which now employs 85 people worldwide as well as distributors.

“We really thrive on the quality of our products and the fact that we do a lot

of training of eye doctors and medical personnel internationally,” says Dr. Boughadou. “Unlike most of our competitors, we make visits to clinics and take care of simple things like replacing any of our broken lenses for free, it all adds up.”

Working internationally also requires other savvy business practices, especially pricing for cataract treatment which can run anywhere from \$200 to \$700 in Algeria.

“We are careful not to transfer the same prices from country to country, especially if we are dealing with a less-affluent country,” says Boughadou. “You just can’t sell ocular lenses in Algeria for the same price you would sell them in Europe.”

Dr. Boughadou should know, he spent a lot of time cracking the Algeria market and has made great progress with the help of Commerce Department’s Commercial Service office in Algiers.

“Algeria is a difficult country in which to do business, because access to key officials is quite limited,” Boughadou says, “However, the Commercial Service knew the right people and arranged key meetings for me that were very productive.”

In addition, Boughadou participated in Commerce’s International Trade Fair in Algiers, an organized U.S. Pavilion that links American firms with potential foreign customers.

"I have the best job in the world," says Dr. Boughadou, "When you go to a place like Egypt or Algeria and you help blind people see, it gets pretty emotional." ■

Editor's note: Dr. Boughadou is also active in Doctors Without Borders, a volunteer-based organization that also works to help prevent blindness and restore eyesight.

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